The Foundation of Christian Virtue

• Starting Point: The world is headed toward a promised future in which, “under the sovereign and wise rule of the creator God, decay and death will be done away with and a new creation born.”

• Christians will have a role to play in God’s promised future.

Questions to Consider

• What is the goal toward which we are aiming our children?
• How are we guiding our children to reach that goal?
Character Shaped by Our Habits of Life

• Aristotelian Virtue: Aimed toward happiness, or a fully flourishing human being; distinguished by strengths of the mind and of character.

• Aristotle recognized that human life does not just coast along - instead, you become what you habitually do.
“Virtue is not necessarily another way of saying, ‘goodness.’ In the strictest sense, virtue is what happens when someone has made a thousand small choices, requiring effort and concentration, to do something which is good and right but which doesn’t come naturally - and then, on the thousand and first time, when it really matters, they find that they do what’s required ‘automatically.’”

C. S. Lewis on Virtue

• “Now it is the quality rather than the particular actions which we mean when we talk about virtue” (*Mere Christianity*, 73).

• This is an important definition because:
  • We might think that, provided you did the right thing, it did not matter how or why you did it.
  • We might think that God simply wanted obedience to a set of rules; whereas he really wants people of a particular sort.
Tension

• Our role vs. God’s role in the development of our children.

• “Moral Spontaneity.”

• The difference between Christian and pagan virtue.
Distinctly Christian Virtue

- Happiness vs. Blessedness

“Unlike the Aristotelian scheme, Christian virtue isn’t about you - your happiness, your fulfillment, your self-realization. It’s about God and God’s kingdom, and your discovery of a genuine human existence by the paradoxical route - the route God himself took in Jesus Christ - of giving yourself away, of generous love which constantly refuses to take center stage” (Wright, After You Believe, 70).
The Aim of Christian Virtue

- Rulers and Priests: Reflecting God back to God in worship and reflecting God to the world through stewardship.
The Aim of Christian Virtue

• “Worship and stewardship, generating justice and beauty: these are the primary vocations of God’s redeemed people. And the habits of heart, mind, and life to which we are called are designed to form us, gradually and bit by bit, into people who can, with the hard-won “second nature” that we call virtue, freely and gladly take forward these tasks” (Wright, After You Believe, 83).
The Aim of Christian Virtue

• The aim of Christian virtue reminds us that we have a job to do.

• The aim of Christian virtue teaches us that the quality of virtue is more important than a few particular actions.

• The aim of Christian virtue allows us to demonstrate the beauty of the Bible’s metanarrative.
How: The Virtuous Circle

Practices → Scripture → Stories → Examples → Community → Practices
• **Scripture**: The practice of reading, studying, singing - generally soaking oneself in Scripture as an individual and a community - has been seen from the earliest days of Christianity as central to the formation of Christian character.
The Virtuous Circle

• **Stories**: We are storied people, living amidst various plots and looking for resolution. We connect with stories, are inspired by stories, and want to see our story connected with God’s Story.
The Virtuous Circle

- **Examples**: We need people to emulate. We need to see what virtue looks like as we attempt to develop it within ourselves.
The Virtuous Circle

- **Community**: We need the whole and entire company of the people of God. We also need small groups, places where sharply focused learning can happen and where decisive action can be planned and taken. Of course, the most consistent source of community for our children is family.
Practices: Central to the Christian faith is the practice of shared worship. Family practices also largely shape our children and the way they view this world.
What is Virtue?

• Virtue is character shaped by our habits of life - character that will manifest itself when it really matters.

• These habits then shape those who practice them into people who worship the creator whole-heartedly and steward his world wisely, generating justice and beauty, carrying forward the tasks for which God placed us on the earth.

• As parents, we have an immensely important role to play in the development of our children and an incredible opportunity, by God’s grace and with his power, to instill virtue within them.